Susan Fiksdal

Interviewed by Nancy Taylor

The Evergreen State College oral history project

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Final 2

Taylor: Okay, we're back on. We just had a delicious lunch at Susan's house in Olympia. It's time to talk more about coordinated studies.

Fiksdal: As I said, for several years, I was just teaching these modules, what we called modules at the time—courses—teaching French. Then, in the spring of '75, Cruz Esquivel, who I had kept in touch with, asked me if I would teach with him in a program focused on Mexico. I loved Mexico and had been there, and I thought it would be good to do.

I had already studied Spanish because Andrew Hanfman had encouraged me to learn the language. I went up to the UW and took a second-year Spanish class in the summer to learn some Spanish. I entered the second year, and it really wasn't that hard. The grammar is pretty much the same as French.

I did that, and then the summer before we were going to teach, I went to Mexico because my idea is always to go to the country and immerse myself in language to really learn it. I went to Cuernavaca, where they had very innovative language programs. I learned through the silent way, which was very frustrating. I was so glad I had brought some books with me to learn Spanish in a different way. But you would learn vocabulary and sentence structure by trying it. That silent part was the professor. Completely silent. If you were wrong, they used hand gestures to try and get you to say it correctly.

Taylor: But you never heard the accent.

Fiksdal: Well, it was all around me all the time. I lived with a family—they put us with host families—and you're talking to kids, you're talking to grandparents, you're going to fiestas. You're integrated into the community, so I heard it all around me.

I told Cruz, "Okay, I could do that," because I had learned some Spanish. [chuckles] I wasn't super advanced, but I thought it would be okay. Unfortunately, he planned it. He had worked with students for a while in Spanish, and he was, I guess, a point person in Spanish, whereas I was in French.

And Nancy Allen, who had been hired in Spanish, wasn't teaching Spanish, so basically, he was the focal person.

He had students who wanted to go to Mexico. They already knew Spanish, or they didn't, and they wanted to do various projects. For example, one was in the Veracruz Symphony Orchestra. You don't need to know Spanish to play in the orchestra, I guess, at least she didn't. To be in a country's orchestra is a pretty big deal. It wasn't the national orchestra, but Veracruz is a big city. The idea was that the students would be in Mexico for two quarters, and then they would come home. We would put on some displays of what they learned.

I had my students and he had his. I took my students to this tiny village, where my professors from Cuernavaca were from, Chalchihuites.

Taylor: How was your Spanish at this point?

Fiksdal: It got really good really fast. [laughing]

A: And the students were fine with it?

Fiksdal: The students were not very advanced, so they didn't know. What I did was I asked these professors from Cuernavaca to teach the students, because I didn't want to be teaching them. I wasn't so sure I could do that. But for the more advanced students, I worked with them in literature because I knew how to do that.

Chalchihuites is very close to Zacatecas, and Zacatecas is known, but it's not a place foreigners go, really, which was all the better. I wanted that. It's in the mountains, it's in the north, so there were a lot of stews. They had tacos, but it was not like Mexican food you eat in this country. The students just loved it. They were in families.

Taylor: You made all these arrangements?

Fiksdal: Yeah, I made all the arrangements when I got there with my Cuernavaca friend, who was from that village, so it wasn't that hard. But I had a problem right away with two students, a man and a woman, who were in love, crazy in love. They wanted to be housed as a couple. I said, "Well, this is Mexico, so we're going to have to say you're married. Because you can't just live with someone. That's just not going to work." They agreed. We found them a family so that was fine.

It wasn't that long—I think it was a month later someone comes running up to me and says, "Oh my god! The men are going to kill Eddie"—who was one of the other students. I said, "What do you

mean they're going to kill him?" "Well, they're all drinking in the cantina, drinking shots with James, the so-called husband.

They were all getting very drunk, and James had been complaining because Eddie was getting close to his "wife." Of course, they weren't married, but this other student kind of liked her and she kind of liked this Eddie, so they were trying to get rid of James somehow, but they didn't know what they were going to do. The men were like "What? Someone's trying to steal your wife?" One guy pulled out a gun and shot it into the roof of the cantina.

Some students came running to tell me this. I went to the police station. There's this guy there, and I explained what was happening. He understood right away that James's honor was at stake, so they all had to protect James from this Eddie. Shooting him would be the easiest. I said, "Maybe it's the easiest but he's a person, a student, and I'm responsible for him, and he cannot die. He cannot get maimed, he cannot get shot at. You have to go, you're the police representative here." And these are all his buddies, these guys in the cantina.

Taylor: It was the Mexicans that were going to shoot up Eddie?

Fiksdal: Oh, yeah. Somehow it gets worked out. Then these students, they're not happy in their arrangement because basically, James is no longer wanted. But he's in the same room with this woman who wants to be with Eddie. I told them they just had to grin and bear it, because it was just one quarter that we were there—fall—and there was nothing I could do. You can't just get divorced. I said, "What do you want to do? Get married down here? Look at how long your first marriage lasted." [laughter] They were unhappy, but they managed.

Taylor: Did they stay together?

Fiksdal: Yeah, they had to. James stayed with the woman and Eddie mooned around. It's such a tiny town. Everyone knows what you're doing at all times.

Taylor: But they stayed? They finished the quarter?

Fiksdal: They all stayed, they finished the quarter, and they went with me to the next town in winter. My idea when I had planned this was that they would go to this tiny village that I had only heard about—I'd never been to—because that would be really good for learning a lot of Spanish right away in a place where there were absolutely never any tourists ever. Then we would go to Jalapa, which is near Veracruz on the coast. I knew it was a bourgeois town, completely opposite from this poor little village, and we should see both worlds.

Taylor: How many students did you have?

Fiksdal: Probably 12. We were getting very close. But before we leave this tiny little village, what happens is this young man shows up. Again, there's this big flurry of excitement and people come to me and say, "Oh, my, god! Jessica's boyfriend is here!" How did he find this tiny village in Mexico? I don't know.

This guy, Devon, had hardly any Spanish. He arrives and he's mooning around outside Jessica's window. Now we would call that stalking, and we know it's part of sexual harassment. We didn't have those concepts then, except that Jessica was just white as a sheet when I saw her, she was so upset. They had been gone out a bit at Evergreen, but she had broken up with him, and she thought of him as just, I don't know, a little bit pushy. He wouldn't accept that they were no longer a couple and he kept showing up all the time, and that was one of the reasons she had come on this trip, to get away from him.

Devon doesn't seem like a normal, reasonable person. I asked, "Why are you here?" "For Jessica." I said, "She doesn't love you and she doesn't want you here. We're doing an academic program, and I need her to be focused on her work. You're causing a real problem, in the village as well." There started to be all these people in the village who were rooting for him. He had gotten a ride with these men in the back of a pickup truck, and they all loved him because, I don't know, he was a nice guy. They understood that he came because he was crazy in love [loco de amor], and they all understood the feeling.

Then he told me, "I'm just so in love with her. I have to be with her." I said, "But she doesn't want to be with you. You have to leave." I put him in a truck the next day and said, "Take him away and do not bring him back." They didn't bring him back, but someone else did. He was mooning around in Zacatecas. He knew the route, and so he'd get on the route and he'd beg a ride.

Three times I tried to get rid of him. Three times he came back. I didn't really know what to do. I talked to my Mexican friend, who was there teaching.

Taylor: You're 25 years old.

Fiksdal: Yeah, I'm young. I speak Spanish really well by this point, but I don't really know what to do. My friend says, "We'll put him in the school." How that worked, I can't remember. School must have been out for some reason, out of session, but it was fall. Anyway, we put him in there. He said, "That will be kind of like a jail for him. We'll lock the doors." Of course, he just scales the wall—it's all open—so he's out in seconds.

I don't really know what to do. We meet again, my friend, me, and the police representative. The representative is not really trained, because he's in this tiny village, so he doesn't really know what to do. We're talking and he says, "The only thing I know to do is put him in a real jail." I said, "In Zacatecas? You're going to put him in jail?"

Now, this calls up all kinds of things to me, because my husband, Allen, had once been rounded up from a beach in Mexico and put in Guadalajara jail. He and his friends were scared. They didn't have money, and they couldn't bribe, and they were getting kind of hungry, and they didn't know how to get out of there. Finally, they were flown out. The government just didn't know what to do with them and just flew them to the States. But the stories of the people they met in the jails were such that once you're in the jails, it's pretty hard to get out. I thought, I'm putting an Evergreen student in jail.

Taylor: But this kid wasn't a student of yours.

Fiksdal: He wasn't my student. I don't know if he was enrolled. He's just there, this kid. Rudy Martin was my dean, so I called Rudy and I said, "I'm having trouble with this guy." I told him his name. "He's here and I don't know how to get rid of him. I try to send him off and he doesn't go." Rudy said, "Call me back. I'll find out his parents' names and you can call them."

I think I called him several times. He didn't know quite what to do either. Larry Stenberg was involved. Larry knew the student, so he was obviously already kind of a problem. Oh, and Larry was supposed to dis-enroll him and kick him out of Evergreen, but he didn't. Because the kid was nice. People thought, oh, we'll give another chance.

I finally get ahold of the dad. But meanwhile, we go ahead, and we put Devon in the jail in Zacatecas. I go to visit, of course. I find that he knows what to say. The people are asking him things and he says, "Oh, I'm just crazy for love—loco de amor." They all understand that, and they said, "Oh, we're so sorry that you're jailed because of that." He says, "Yeah, I can't see her." "Oh, we're so sorry. She'll come around."

I go back about three days later, and there's this beautiful Mexican woman with him who is his buddy, who's bringing him food and talking to him. I can't believe it. [laughing] Like I said, Devon is nice, and so she's helping him. She's someone who comes to the jail as a volunteer. She's from the upper class of Zacatecas. She has tons of money, and to help out, she goes and talks to the prisoners. She found it really interesting to talk to a *norteamericano*. So he's got buddies in the jail, and then this woman who talks to him through the bars. I had found out that his dad was coming, so I informed him of that.

I go out to the airport to meet the dad. This is a tiny airport, so the plane lands and the father has to walk quite a way to get inside the airport. So he's walking, and as he's walking towards me, he pulls something out of his pocket and everything just flies out—his passport, his money. And I think, great. He's not going to be the one that gets the kid out of anything, because clearly, he doesn't know what he's doing. This Mexican money, he doesn't know anything about pesos. He's just not what I was expecting, and he couldn't speak Spanish, of course.

I go to the chief of police with the dad and I said, "This is Devon's father. The boy cannot be in Mexico at all—because he keeps coming back to upset my student. My student is a wonderful person who doesn't love him." I just decided to talk about love, because it's what they seem to understand. He loves her. She doesn't love him. He has to go away, because she's a serious student and blah blah.

Taylor: Did the father understand what was going on?

Fiksdal: Yeah, he understood, because I had called him. I said to the police chief, "You need to release the student in the custody of the father, and the father needs to take him back home. That way we can finish out our quarter and everything will be okay." The chief looks at me and he says, "Why is he in the jail?" [laughing] I have to remind him of why he's in the jail. He's never hurt anyone.

Oh, and I forgot a really important part. When he climbs the walls or the school—this is like the fourth time he's escaped in Chalchihuites. Before he goes to jail in Zacatecas, he announces to me, " "I'm Jesus Christ Superstar." I said, "What?" [laughing]

Then I realized he's unbalanced. He's got some kind of mental health issue, because he's just this nice, gentle soul. Right?

Taylor: And he's like 20?

Fiksdal: Oh, yeah, he's 20. I tell his dad that he's got some kind of mental health issue. I can't seem to talk to him in any rational way; that he's made friends, but he can't stay in the jail. He didn't even seem upset that his son was in the jail. That was the odd thing. The father seemed kind of out of it also.

Finally, I do get him released. They leave. I have spent I can't tell you how many hours on this one kid, who isn't even my student, who has harassed us in Mexico—except I didn't have the word harassed at the time.

Taylor: How is Jessica during this whole thing? Is she the one that's supposedly married?

Fiksdal: This student, that's the odd thing. She didn't even write about it; she didn't talk about how wonderful I was to have dealt with this difficult situation. I don't know. She wanted to be protected,

and I protected her, and that was that. I guess that was my job. I didn't think it was my job. None of this was supposed to be my job. I was their teacher. Right? That was my first experience taking students abroad.

Taylor: Rudy gave you support?

Fiksdal: Yeah, I mean, kind of. He found the father, but there wasn't any more that he could figure out to do.

Taylor: I remember when Eric Larsen took students to Spain really, really early. He had two students that were Mormon maybe, and they stopped being students and started being proselytizers. There was a real problem with that, and he—

Fiksdal: It's a real problem. You've got these students who really want to do what they want to do. You try to make concessions, but . . .

Taylor: We'll get to that point, because you've done lots of overseas study. You have lots of experience.

Fiksdal: Yeah. Surprisingly, even though all that happened, I still took students abroad later.

Taylor: That was the worst experience you had?

Fiksdal: That was the worst. The next-worst was the winter quarter. I'm now not in the mountains far from everything, where there's not even transportation very often. I'm now in Jalapa, which is a major city. Very worthwhile place. To give you an idea, I'm looking out my window one day, and I look onto this beautiful park with a pond, and there's a path around the pond, it's kind of a large pond. There's a path and people walk their dogs around it. There's a guy walking his anteater. [laughing] This was in the '70s. There are rich, crazy people everywhere.

The students were pretty happy there. We had a good space. There, I had run into these two guys on the street—young men—and I talked to them about these students coming. They found the families and they organized everything. It was like two days before everyone came.

Taylor: Those students had good experiences?

Fiksdal: They had wonderful experiences. They really learned a lot, and they were happy. In the village, they learned weaving, they learned rug making, all kinds of things they were doing in the village. In Jalapa, I can't quite remember. I think I let them follow their own interests. There were people that were really interested in music and various things.

Taylor: So you didn't have scheduled classes?

Fiksdal: No, we did. We still had classes, which I had to teach because I didn't have my backup people. But they got to do their independent projects that were less constrained than they were in Chalchihuites.

Taylor: Where was Cruz?

Fiksdal: That's what everyone kept asking me. I was starting to get all these messages from his students that they had never seen him. All of fall quarter, he wasn't in Mexico, or if he was, he never saw his students. So in winter quarter, I felt they were Evergreen students, they were getting credit somehow, and no one was looking at how they were getting credit. I think I had a two-week period where I had to just go and find all these people, talk to them, and be a mentor and a teacher to them.

Taylor: They were all over Mexico?

Fiksdal: They were all over.

Taylor: How did you find them? Because this is before the Internet.

Fiksdal: I think I wrote to Cruz and told him he had to send me that information and he did. But I didn't understand why he wasn't doing his job. I just didn't know.

Taylor: So that was the end of him?

Fiksdal: Well, when I came back in the spring, my students put on a show in the Library about the work that they had done. They invited everyone, and it was very cool. They spoke good Spanish by then. They had done very well.

But Cruz's students, I'm not sure if they came back. They may have stayed, I really don't remember. Because I went to visit them and really spent time—sometimes half a day or sometimes overnight—to hear every problem, and to solve a few things if I could. I was really their only contact with someone at Evergreen for the whole year.

Taylor: And nobody complained to the college?

Fiksdal: That, I don't know. They could have, and probably someone must have. Cruz and I met for our evaluation conference together. We both had read the evaluations each of us had written the other. Mine was very honest and said, "Where were you? I had to visit your students. I hardly heard from you the whole time." I think I heard from him twice in that whole six months. I said, "I had to teach my students, and then I had to visit yours, who had not seen you, who had not gotten any direction, who had not gotten any support."

He grabbed his evaluation of me back—which was very positive—and said, "I'm going to rip this up." I said, "Go ahead." He said, "I'm going to write really bad things about you because you're writing bad things about me." I said, "I'm just being honest. You do what you want." I don't think I ever saw his evaluation of me, actually, but I turned mine in to the dean, not just giving it to him but another copy to the dean, because I felt that people needed to know what was happening.

It wasn't a coordinated studies program. We were not coordinated. And he didn't help me. He was the elder, the one that was supposed to be the coordinator, and basically, I did everything.

Taylor: Did he leave the college after that?

Fiksdal: Yeah, soon after that. I think it took a year. My understanding was that he had lied on his resume, but I'm not sure. I had heard he wasn't doing his work. But I was sorry to see him go. He was brilliant. He really was, and a good person deep down, but he just didn't like responsibility, I think. [laughing]

Taylor: That was '74.

Fiksdal: No, that was '75-76.

Taylor: And you were married then.

Fiksdal: Yeah, I had to leave my husband when I taught in Mexico, but we didn't have kids at the time.

Taylor: That was before Mara was born.

Fiksdal: Since I was going to go to Mexico for six months, he decided to go get his master's degree, so he did that. He moved to Portland and went to Portland State and got his master's, so we were both doing something.

Taylor: Then what happened?

Fiksdal: I had taken students abroad, but it was to the wrong place. I wanted to go to France.

Taylor: It's interesting that the first program you were in and the first language is not French.

Fiksdal: Not even my language. But I felt sorry for all the students who desperately wanted to learn Spanish. I mean, I had gotten lots of questions, and Cruz, of course, was overwhelmed, and Nancy Allen wanted to do other things.

I had a lot of empathy for Nancy because I knew her. She and you and a lot of other women—probably all of us—we were all in the women's movement at Evergreen. We were meeting. I don't know how regular it was, but we would meet off-campus to talk about women's issues, and the kinds of

feelings we had. It was a very patronizing kind of place. We discovered, as we talked, I remember that most of us that were hired were hired with master's degrees, and we even conjectured whether that was what the men wanted, they wanted woman at a lower status? I'm sure that wasn't by design, but who knows?

I joined the women's studies seminar because I didn't have a seminar. You're supposed to have a faculty seminar. We read a lot of women's studies books. We learned a lot. I read the Grimké sisters, I had just a wide array of books.

Taylor: Who did you meet with?

Fiksdal: I can't quite remember everyone, and I'm not sure everyone came regularly.

Taylor: Just a group?

Fiksdal: Yeah. Do you remember Bonnie Greenhut?

Taylor: Oh, I do.

Fiksdal: Except Naomi Greenhut. She changed her first and last name.

Taylor: She taught with Nancy.

Fiksdal: She was pretty great to talk to. And Nancy. Those are the two I remember the most. I was new to the whole business of seminars and faculty seminars, but I really enjoyed that because it was a small group, and we really talked through what we were reading. I didn't do the research on which books to read, I know that. I was super-busy with my French classes, and then Spanish.

Taylor: It's easy to be in a faculty seminar when you're teaching what you're reading, but when you were having to read extra things, I wouldn't have been able to do it.

Fiksdal: But I wasn't teaching in a coordinated studies program, I was teaching things I knew. I would get books that I didn't know and teach them, but that didn't take over my life.

Taylor: What was the next coordinated studies program you were in?

Fiksdal: Then I taught alone for a couple of years. I did France Today and took students abroad finally in '77-78. In '78-'79, I taught Modernization and the Individual. That really was a true coordinated studies program, with Pris Bowerman, Matt Smith, and we had a visitor from Saint Martin's—he was a sociologist—Larry Smith.

Taylor: You didn't teach French that year?

Fiksdal: No, I taught French Literature in Translation. We got together to plan, and the idea was to look at that whole change in how European people saw themselves, from guilds and people living communally, to the French Revolution where each individual had rights. It was quite exciting, because I actually had not taught about the French Revolution. I had studied it, but that's it. But I had studied it from a historian's point of view, not the point of view that they were going to look at. So they wanted novels from before and after the Revolution, and there was no other literature person, so we just did French novels. They just kept saying, "What's another one? What's another one?" So I just did all the best-known—*The Red and the Black* by Stendhal, and *Madame Bovary*. We just did all those.

It was fun. And then I had to read very widely to create lectures. If I am correct, it was the first time Matt Smith had taught in a program, or if not, it was the first time he had lectured. After the first lecture, I found out later, he had to go and throw up. So nervous. Knowing that taught me a lot because I was new to the whole idea, and to be treated equally, and work with people who thought I would offer something to the program was exciting. The summer before, Pris and I had been on a Lilly grant, where we got to learn from each other.

Taylor: Each One Teach One.

Fiksdal: Each One Teach One. She taught me some economics and I taught her to analyze literature. I think we read some French literature, but the idea was to try and help her understand why one would want to study literature to understand about metaphor and things. She had never done it before and was interested. I had had a lot of trouble in economics, the one course I took as an undergrad, so I was interested in trying to understand more.

At the end of the summer, it was so funny. I turned to her and I said, "Pris, I think really that economics has the answer." She said, "You're kidding. I think literature has the answer." [laughter] We both laughed about that over the years.

Teaching with her was nice because I already knew her. That was a great program—really good—because I had studied French Civilization. But Matt, as a political scientist, brought a lot in that I wouldn't have known otherwise. Also, he insisted that we read not a textbook, but original works. So we were reading Adam Smith and other philosophers. That was a real education for me because I hadn't read the originals, I just had a textbook when I was in college.

Taylor: Through all of this, does a kind of educational philosophy develop in you? You didn't come on a crusade to do something—well, you did—French language.

Fiksdal: Yeah.

Taylor: But in terms of understanding an educational point of view and an educational philosophy, you sort of grew with it.

Fiksdal: Yes, that's right. Right from the beginning, I understood that Evergreen's pedagogy was student-centered, and that we were to teach, but we were more like guides, so we would give people things to read and discuss. The trouble is, if you give them something to read, you have to have read it yourself. So it was just a hell of a lot of work. [laughter] But I understood that that was what we wanted to do, and I accepted the philosophy hook, line and sinker.

I felt that what I had to offer was like a coordinated studies program, because it was. It was history, literature, language, linguistics. I had all of that to offer. It was just in French, and people didn't value it as much because it was in French.

Taylor: That's why I always thought cultural studies programs made so much sense, because by nature, they're interdisciplinary.

Fiksdal: They are. You can't really teach the language without talking about history and culture. And French is so agricultural. Even in the very first text I studied, the vocabulary was all about animals and farm life. It's an agricultural country, and you have to understand that. You have to understand Catholicism and all the variations of Catholicism including corruption and things like that. And truly understand the values of the Revolution, and how they play out in modern-day France.

And I think teaching this program with Matt and Pris—Larry was a visitor, so he was learning, too—they were very good guides about how to teach, and who would have to do what. It just was the most relaxing program, in some ways, because I only had to lecture once in a while. I wasn't on stage every minute. I was learning a lot by reading all our books. For me, the educational philosophy, the part that I loved, was I was always learning. As I mentioned, I had fallen in love with learning only when I was a junior in college. [laughing] I really didn't get it before that. I did my work, but I wasn't—

Taylor: I don't think I got it until I came to Evergreen.

Fiksdal: Yeah. And then I think teaching at Evergreen just instills a love of learning in you. You want to teach with someone else because you want to know what they know. Then you don't get to know everything they know, and so you're trying to figure out how to learn more. I mean, I think, for me, it was the best life I could ever have. I was always learning, and happy, and I enjoyed it. But the philosophy of Evergreen, this—

Taylor: For you, what are the essential elements? Interdisciplinary study, teams, student-centered.

Fiksdal: To me almost more important than all those—although those have to be there, too—but overall is innovation, innovation in the way you're approaching your questions or topics. Because each time you're teaching a coordinated studies program, it's new. You're trying to put together things that, as far as you know, have never been put together before, so you have to find the problem or the issue that's central to that, and you've got to make sure you're always addressing it; you're not just teaching whatever you want to teach, but that it connects.

That calls for enormous amounts of innovation. I think what most of us have done is figure out ways to lead seminar that are different, depending on the book. And workshops have to be quickly improvised when you realize people aren't understanding something, and you need to make those connections clear. It's partly your fault because you didn't know what confusions might arise until you're teaching in the program, because you haven't read all those books yet. To me, innovation in teaching was one of the most important things, and not just going back to some notes and something you used to teach. Like I used to teach History 354, and I'm going to give all those lectures in this program. Well, that's the exact wrong way to do it. But I have encountered faculty trying to do that.

I think this constant innovation of creating something intellectually engaging is at the heart. However, there's a real problem with the coordinated studies model, and that's language, math, music, sciences—lots of things that need to be taught by proceeding point by point, getting stronger and stronger, and learning more and more vocabulary, and how those and other concepts fit together—all that kind of work is very hard to do in a coordinated studies program.

What I wanted to do was make language learning relevant, and not just through literature. I liked literature, but I really liked language, so for the first eight years, I was really focused on language and literature. And when I could, when I was teaching something I called French culture, I would add in as much as possible. Every time I went to France, I would buy more books, and I found lots of ways of talking about economics and history. I really educated myself about France and its history.

My idea before very long was, I should do that every other year; teach this program every other year, even if I were alone, because for a long time, I was alone, and there was no one to teach with me. I mean, several people wanted to teach with me, but they didn't know French, and I wanted French language to be half the program.

Taylor: And you wanted to teach in French.

Fiksdal: Yeah, I wanted to teach the whole thing in French. When we finally hired Marianne Bailey, we were able to do that. We gave lectures in French. We wrote out the lectures and put them in the

Library in a notebook, so students could refer to them. We handed out an outline in French of what we were going to talk about. It was really hard for beginners. Really hard. But they were amazing, those beginners. They'd get what they could. I told them, "This is how we learn. It's immersion. You just try to figure out meaning through context. You write down the dates from the blackboard and you look at your outline, and if it's not on there, well, listen carefully. It's more like gestalt. You just listen, and little by little, things will start making sense to you." Sure enough, they did. We were demanding. Really demanding. Then they would work with more advanced students to round out what they learned.

Taylor: Meanwhile, they were separated out in terms of levels of French.

Fiksdal: Yeah, we had beginners. We always had at least three levels, most of the time four. We hired adjuncts to help. Then our seminar was literature, but the overall lecture series was about everything.

Sometimes we'd have them read, like I remember one year we read a book in English about the Haitian sugar cane industry. It was written by a political scientist or an economist.

Taylor: That was in French?

Fiksdal: That book was in English. We would have our seminars in English so that they could read whole books. We wanted them to read an entire novel, not just parts of it. Because that's part of what we're about at Evergreen is having them get the whole experience.

For example, I would teach beginners quite often. I got to be a real specialist at it. Somehow, with my zeal and my excitement about it, I could get them to read *The Stranger* in French in the second quarter of their study of French. It was amazing. They were serious students, and they cared.

Taylor: And you were absolutely content to teach all levels of French.

Fiksdal: Oh, yeah. It doesn't matter.

Taylor: I think that has been an issue with Stacy Davis. She didn't want to be a French teacher, she wanted to be a French history teacher.

Fiksdal: Yeah, because that was her field. She had never, ever taught French. But her French background was quite extensive. She went to a high school where she did everything in French. She had a French husband.

Taylor: She was fluent in French.

Fiksdal: She's fluent, yeah.

Taylor: But she didn't think of her job as teaching French.

Fiksdal: No. Even in France, she deferred to me, and I had to work everything out. [laughing] When things happened, I had to fix it. For example, one time I had thought I had arranged a bus trip for a fieldtrip. Every Wednesday, we took the students somewhere on a fieldtrip because they didn't seem to go anywhere themselves. We couldn't understand that, so we just started arranging things. And everything was so cheap, because if you're a student there, they really reduce the price. So I thought I had everything arranged. I called to check on a Monday, I think, and they didn't have anything arranged.

I had just read this book about the French; that what you do is you just go a little bit crazy in the office and demand things and you will be successful. I told Stacy I was going to try this. I'd never tried it before. Usually I would just give up and say, "Oh, god, we didn't get it organized. We'll do it another week." I go in there and I explain very nicely how I had called, and no file was created, so nothing happened. And yet, we are supposed to go in two days' time. The woman said, "That is one of the places that our buses go, but we don't have it in the file so you can't do it."

Then I said "What?" I went on and on about these students, and how we do all this work with them, and every week is planned, and this week is just falling through, and it shouldn't fall through because I called, and they just didn't follow up, and they should have followed up. "What are we going to do now?" And I just looked at her. She said, "Well, we will fix it." [laughing] So, they fixed it.

I was really glad I had to do everything, because I learned a lot.

Taylor: But you were willing to do the language, too, but you got help. You got adjuncts at some point.

Fiksdal: Yeah, we just requested that from the deans. Our programs then were a little more expensive than, say, any other humanities program, where you just have books and you can just stay on campus.

Taylor: Stacy is in history, and so are there any study abroad French programs?

Fiksdal: Yes. Every other year there is a French program. But what Marianne Bailey does is she teaches a lot with Bob Haft, who joined us after a while. In the '90s, he came to us and wanted to work with us. I said, "Do you know French?" He said he did. So what he did in our program, to make sure his French was good enough, he came to my advanced French class that year, and he was the best student. He taught photography, which works out very well for students traveling abroad, and students who just want to do some kind of art.

Taylor: But he's now retired.

Fiksdal: Yeah, he's retired. Then Steven Hendricks wanted to teach in the French program. He used to be a student at Evergreen years ago, and worked with Marianne apparently. He teaches with her now, and they can have any number of people working with them because it's more of a literature—

Taylor: But who teaches the language?

Fiksdal: Judy Gabriele.

Taylor: She's been doing it for a while.

Fiksdal: Yeah, forever.

Taylor: But she doesn't travel. She's an adjunct.

Fiksdal: The reason that we're traveling with students is not just for them, but for us to maintain our fluency and our understanding of the French world. It's like a fieldtrip. You've got to go.

Taylor: And then the students are enrolled in a language program when they're there or something?

Fiksdal: No, we teach them. We've always taught them. Marianne teaches languages. She just doesn't want to give it very many credits in the program. I wanted always eight credits to be language, and she wanted four or three or two or something.

Taylor: But you don't do the kind of program that you did where it was three quarters, and you started out with students who knew nothing, and by spring quarter, they'd go to Europe.

Fiksdal: Our students have changed radically, so we don't get students who come with advanced French anymore, and haven't for years. Basically, you're teaching big groups of beginners and intermediates. Some people are very good at it, for one reason or another. Either they have studied another language, or they're just very good at learning a language. So you end up always with three levels. We're always pushing them pretty hard.

Taylor: And then a select group will go?

Fiksdal: A select group always goes. Steven has taken students, but what they usually do, as I understand it, is they divide their time. Steven might go for five weeks, and then Marianne goes for five weeks, something like that.

Taylor: And the Spanish group is still strong because of Alice?

Fiksdal: It's strong not just because of Alice Nelson, and not just because before Nancy retired, she made sure they hired another person in Spanish, because Diego de Acosta, who was that person, left last year. He just decided he didn't want to teach anymore. But we had already hired another person.

The idea we always had, and that we argued for and tried for, was to have three people that could teach all manner of things French, all manner of things Spanish, etc., so that we'd have some time off and we could pursue other interests, and so you'd have enough people in a pinch to teach language—if you needed more levels, or sometimes you have years with a lot of students for some reason—they could maybe come in and change what they were planning to do.

Alice was able to capture people's ears because she kept expanding her goals nicely. So instead of just saying she knows Chilean Spanish, and hiring someone who knows Castilian Spanish and culture and history, what she has argued for is getting someone who can really help teach what they call heritage students. There are a lot of Hispanic students who speak a Spanish that they knew when they were little, but they don't have much of a vocabulary, and they don't know much about their culture

Taylor: Did they hire somebody?

Fiksdal: Yes, they've hired someone, so they have three excellent faculty in Spanish now. By making different arguments for each one, somehow it's worked. Alice is active in the college—people know who she is—but Marianne, I don't even think she's ever gone to a faculty meeting—maybe one that I made her go to—but she's a very shy person and doesn't like to be in the center of anything. She somehow has opted out, and to have that be the last person who does French is kind of too bad.

Taylor: There is nobody else. Well, Steve Hendricks, but he's not going to be the leader.

Fiksdal: No, no. He'll teach French literature, but he'll do it in a different way. He's interested in experimental fiction.

Taylor: You have brought up a major problem. In order to allow for a steady stream of, say, a culture program or even a science program or something, it needs to be offered regularly. But you don't want to force faculty to do the same thing year after year, so you've got to have duplicates. When you look at a hiring program, where you want to do something to hire a duplicate, it doesn't necessarily win the day when somebody wants to hire a computer scientist to do something new. Especially now, with the faculty not going to grow because of the budget problems—

Fiksdal: They're hiring now.

Taylor: They are, and I don't know how they're going to deal with it because, again, there's going to be a budget cut for next year.

Fiksdal: I was just at Toska Olson's five-year review, and the deans said that they're working on finding things for faculty to do that are not teaching, because they have too many faculty for the number of students.

Taylor: How are they hiring new people then if that's the case?

Fiksdal: They do have to have people in certain areas. As you know, there are certain areas that are doing well.

Taylor: But are they hiring adjuncts or are they hiring full-time?

Fiksdal: They're hiring full-time, amazingly enough.

Taylor: I don't know how they're going to balance the budget.

Fiksdal: There's just one more thing I wanted to say before we end today, and that's I mentioned how much I loved learning new things and how fun it was. I mentioned that it was students who posed really tough questions sometimes. Sometimes they knew exactly what they wanted to do and needed a book, so we would just do that. But other times they would ask me questions that I just couldn't answer. A lot of them were about language—how do we learn language? How come someone learns it faster than me? I had theories from teaching language, but I didn't know. They also had questions about language itself that I couldn't answer.

So after eight years of teaching, even though I really fought to get that job, I left, and I applied to the University of Michigan in linguistics. When I got there, I found out that I had to do a master's degree, and then a PhD. They didn't have one program for the PhD. I only got a three-year leave. I asked for four. Byron Youtz was our Provost at the time and he said, "You can have three." I said, "Well, Linda Kahan had four years off, and she only worked for the NSF. I'm getting a new degree, completely different. You don't have a linguist." He said, "You can have three years."

When I left Evergreen, I didn't worry about my studies. I just decided, well, I'll just go fast. [chuckles] Traditional schools, they don't like you to go fast. I had one faculty member who was kind of against me, just because I wanted to go through their program very fast.

Taylor: At Michigan?

Fiksdal: Yeah, she was a psycholinguist. Not exactly in my field, but she ended up on my committee. She asked to be on my committee at the end. That was unfortunate, because they wanted to put my dissertation up for a prize, and she voted no.

Taylor: Because you hadn't been there long enough?

Fiksdal: Yeah. I was going too fast. And, my dissertation mentor was an enemy.

Taylor: Did you finish in three years?

Fiksdal: Oh, no. But I finished my master's and required PhD courses. I took my qualifying exams, and I gathered my data. Well, I was hoping it was enough. I did a lot of work gathering data, and then I had to come back to Evergreen, and I had to teach. Finally, in the second year after I came back, I was teaching with Charlie Teske and I said, "I'm sorry, I've got to have spring quarter off. I have to finish this dissertation, or I'll just be an ABD forever."

He understood. He was unhappy, but he understood. Betty Estes came in to replace me because our program was very successful, and if we lost students, more came in.

Taylor: What was the program?

Fiksdal: That one was Making of Meaning. It was a wonderful program.

Taylor: Did you go back to Michigan, or could you do it from here?

Fiksdal: Well, I had to finish writing, so I did that here. Then I went back for my defense.

Taylor: But you had two babies.

Fiksdal: Yes, when I left, my daughter was four, so that was good. But I had a baby two months before we left.

Taylor: Did you all go back together?

Fiksdal: Yes, we all went.

Taylor: Allen went, too?

Fiksdal: Allen had to quit his job at the State of Washington. He was going to stay home and babysit, and off we went. He got a good job. [laughing] Oh, it was crazy, but it was one of the best things I ever did.

Taylor: I was really proud of you for doing that.

Fiksdal: I just loved it. Do you know, getting your degree later in life is so much easier? And it was all in English. [laughter] Okay, so we should stop.